



**Vision
Australia**

Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.

Annual Report 2020-2021



Our mission is to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose.

Above: Six-year-old Harlen with his mum Emma at our Iris Circle Bequest Society function in Brisbane.

Cover image: Five-year-old Ollie sitting at his piano that has been customised with coloured tactile markers to accommodate his vision.

Vision Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and the Traditional Owners of the Land on which we meet and work. We acknowledge the importance of maintaining their cultures, countries and their spiritual connection to the lands and waters, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. Vision Australia acknowledges and respects the genuine diversity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout Australia.

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Chair and CEO report

As much as we would like to, there is simply no escaping the immense impact of COVID-19 on Vision Australia's operations this year.

As a national organisation, not one part of our operations has been able to avoid the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19. Extended lockdowns, border closures that split offices and teams, supply chain interruptions and more: they have all created a significant burden that has affected our ability to both meet the needs of our clients and continue on our path to future-proof our financial sustainability.

The core of Vision Australia is our mission to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose. As an organisation, the hardest thing we've had to come to terms with in the past year is that we've been prevented from providing that support to the extent that we aim for. Nonetheless, this year, we provided support to 35,285 people, and our occupational therapists, orthoptists, speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals provided services to 14,805 people.

While we have embedded telehealth as part of our service delivery model and now view it as an integral part of our client services, it's clear that some of our clients have a strong preference for working with our staff in person. Our focus now is to re-energise our staff, volunteers and clients, and again bring them together, whether that's at home, work, school, or in the community.



Above: Andrew Moffat, Chair (left) with Ron Hooton, CEO (right)

Financially, we are pleased that Vision Australia was able to return a small surplus. While our income from the delivery of services and product sales was down, we were again fortunate to receive generous support from our regular donors, and also to benefit from a rebounding share market and strong financial performance of the Vision Australia Foundation. We cannot overstate the importance that JobKeeper made in easing some of the financial pressure of the past year. The end of the scheme means that, more than ever, we have no choice but to give greater priority to work that will secure our financial sustainability.

Our fundraising efforts are still performing well, with Vision Australia fortunate to receive approximately \$38 million in public charitable support in the past year. We also continue to benefit from the contributions of long-time supporters such as The J.O. & J.R. Wicking Trust.

We are in no way naïve enough to believe the ripples of the past year won't be felt in the future, but advancements across the organisation give us cause for optimism.

For example, we've made significant strides in redesigning our services for children and young people, along with considerable developments in our work to better connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In addition, our work to modernise the Vision Australia Library continues, as do the steps to further integrate our retail subsidiary Quantum into our infrastructure.

Our work of the past 12 months has again benefited from the strong leadership and governance of the Vision Australia Board. This year, we say farewell and pay special thanks to Caroline Waldron, who has made a huge contribution to the organisation since joining the Board in 2013, including serving as Chair for both the Client Services Committee and the People and Culture Committee.

Vision Australia was not alone in facing and overcoming the challenges of the last year, but we believe it's unlikely there is another organisation whose staff, volunteers and supporters have come together like ours in aid of a single mission. This year, more than ever, we extend our sincere gratitude for the efforts and passion that everyone at Vision Australia has shown in supporting people who are blind or have low vision.



Andrew Moffat
Chair
Vision Australia



Ron Hooton
CEO
Vision Australia

A special note of thanks to our staff

We are particularly grateful to our staff who have worked so hard this year to adapt and collaborate with grace, respect and compassion. Their commitment to our mission is evident in our most recent employee survey. Completed by 98% of our workforce, it indicated that staff engagement has improved since the 2014 and 2017 surveys, and that the vast majority of staff connect with our mission and values. Specifically, they positively rate all areas of their employment, particularly organisational communication, leadership, management, and our COVID-19 response.

Our online Q&A sessions for staff continue to be popular, with our CEO, senior leaders and special guests presenting on topics chosen from staff feedback, including ways of tackling some of the challenges of this particularly difficult year.



Above: When Melbourne came out of lockdown, staff at our Kooyong office enjoyed being able to reconnect in our break-out spaces.

Financial performance

Consolidated activities during the 2021 financial year returned a reported surplus of \$2,205,000 (2020: \$28,267,000), which, after adjusting for non-recurring items, provided an underlying adjusted deficit of \$9,060,000 (2020: surplus of \$1,292,000).

The on-going COVID-19 restrictions resulted in repeated closures of our offices and retail stores, a decline in retail sales and fewer face-to-face client service hours. Fundraising income also reduced, despite strong support from regular donors, and investment income was lower despite strong capital gains. The deficit reflects not only reductions in these income streams, but also reduced

variability, and higher employee costs. The deficit was partially offset by managed cost constraint and the gain from change in fair value of non-equity investments.

The reported surplus of \$2,205,000 (2020: \$28,267,000) includes one-off operating items of \$10,102,000 (2020: \$7,147,000), which are largely from JobKeeper funding received due to reduced income resulting from COVID-19. Non-operating items included reversal of prior year property impairments. This differs substantially from the 2020 financial year non-operating items, which included the significant gains made from the sale of the Macaulay Road property and the reversal of property impairments.

Summary of the 2021 financial year surplus

	FY21 \$'000	FY20 \$'000
Adjusted recurring (deficit)/surplus.....	(9,060)	1,292
One-off operating items included in operating surplus.....	10,102	7,147
Adjust for non-operating items.....	1,163	19,828
Reported surplus for the year.....	2,205	28,267

Income and expenditure statement	FY21 \$'000	FY20 \$'000
Revenue.....	119,147	124,481
Purchase of materials, consumables, and movement in inventories.....	(14,557)	(15,421)
Employee benefits expense.....	(70,533)	(65,438)
Depreciation and amortisation expense.....	(6,747)	(6,792)
Right-of-use assets depreciation expense.....	(2,113)	(1,935)
Interest expense on lease liability.....	(224)	(263)
Occupancy expense.....	(3,422)	(3,566)
Events and fundraising expense.....	(9,580)	(9,457)
Other expenses.....	(13,418)	(13,170)
Net (loss)/gain on disposal of assets.....	(88)	16,711
Net impairment reversal/(expense).....	1,338	3,298
Net change in fair value of non-equity investments measured at fair value through profit of loss.....	2,489	-
Restructuring expenses.....	87	(181)
Surplus for the year	2,205	28,267

The reported surplus does not include growth in equity assets. The net assets of the consolidated entity of Vision Australia increased by \$27,496,000 year on year, which comprise the current year's surplus of \$2,205,000 and the increase in equity investments (both realised and unrealised gain) of \$25,291,000.

This reflects the recovery and strong performance of equity markets in financial year 2021, after a decline in financial year 2020 (amounting to a total decrease of \$7,588,000).

The cash position at the end of 30 June 2021 was \$29.55 million (2020: \$34.82 million).

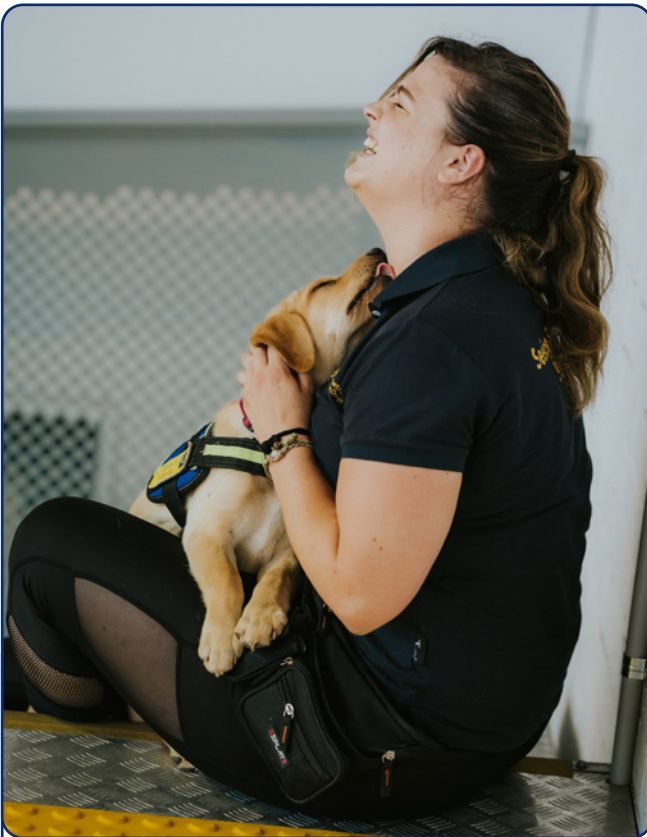
The following balance sheet has been extracted from the audited financial report.

Balance sheet at 30 June 2021	FY21 \$'000	FY20 \$'000
Total current assets.....	45,646	50,421
Total non-current assets.....	263,631	228,768
Total assets.....	309,277	279,189
Total current liabilities.....	24,955	22,198
Total non-current liabilities.....	5,112	5,277
Total liabilities.....	30,067	27,475
Net assets.....	279,210	251,714
Equity		
Retained surplus.....	247,384	240,916
Reserves.....	31,826	10,798
Total equity	279,210	251,714

Our full financial statements are available in standard and large print, braille, audio, DAISY and accessible digital formats. To order a copy in your preferred format, visit our website www.visionaustralia.org or phone 1300 84 74 66.

The challenges and positive outcomes of COVID-19

While it would be easy to focus on the many challenges that COVID-19 brought to our work this year, we also have an opportunity to reflect on what we've learnt, and how we've used these insights to improve our services.



Above: Our Seeing Eye Dogs puppy centre and kennels continued to operate throughout Victoria's lockdowns thanks to staff like puppy development trainer Abi, shown here with pup-in-training Sienna. Staff were flexible about working arrangements so that they could maintain high standards of care, and provide an ongoing supply of Seeing Eye Dogs.

With lockdowns and restrictions in place, Vision Australia took advantage of the many available technologies to change how we work and interact, and by doing so, we actually increased and expanded connections with health professionals, clients and volunteers. For example, we launched a Facebook group for volunteers to help them stay connected with each other and us.

Staff and volunteers were positive and flexible as they juggled work with competing demands, such as remote learning and caring, and remained respectful of other people's needs and personal circumstances.

What we learnt from clients

Events like pandemics and bushfires are difficult for everyone, but they bring unique challenges for people with disability, and these challenges are often undetected and therefore remain unaddressed. To inform our response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, we conducted a survey of 84 clients who lived through these crises. Their responses revealed that they struggled to access essential services, critical information, and items such as groceries and prescription medication.

Another survey that will inform our ongoing advocacy work asked 492 clients about their COVID-related experiences. Their responses revealed several areas of concern, notably social isolation, and practical difficulties in detecting floor markings relating to physical distancing, communicating with people wearing masks, and accessing COVID-19 testing.

Expanding our reach with technology

Although Vision Australia has delivered telehealth for more than 10 years, COVID-19 accelerated its widespread adoption, enabling us to provide more clients with timely access to our services. One of this year's stand-out uses of telehealth was a collaboration between our teams in Western Australia and northern Queensland to deliver timely orthoptic services to clients in northern Queensland.

Telehealth also reduces travel costs, and supports collaboration and better communication because family, carers and other service providers can join the sessions.

Webinars quickly became an effective way to instruct and inform, and we conducted a wide variety of them, including a series about assistive technology, information sessions for Seeing Eye Dogs handlers, three pilot programs for small groups of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) clients, and two seminars to help clients build their self-advocacy skills.

While clients generally prefer face-to-face sessions, it's clear that telehealth filled a significant gap during the pandemic and will continue to be one of our many ways of providing services to our clients. By offering both face-to-face and telehealth options, Vision Australia is giving clients greater choice about how they receive their services.

“It was really good having OT services with Natalie over Zoom because I got the support that I needed, learnt new skills like peeling carrots and we had a lot of fun! I also really liked changing my virtual Zoom background - you should try it!”
11-year-old Tom



Above: Tom and senior practitioner Natalie were delighted to be with each other again at their first face-to-face session after lockdown.

“Telehealth has been life-saving...I’ve been able to get the help I needed, and go for a walk with my long cane after five years of being housebound.” Sandra

Snapshot of our 2020/21 impact



35,285 people accessed our services



201,943 hours of service delivered

45,884 hours provided by recreation and community support workers

44,685 hours of occupational therapy

23,469 hours of access technology support

16,645 hours of orientation and mobility training

30,789 children hours

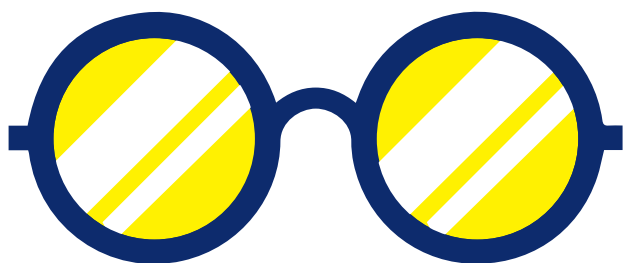
30,789 hours of service provided to clients aged 0-18 (equivalent to 3,849 days)

21,636 telelink hours

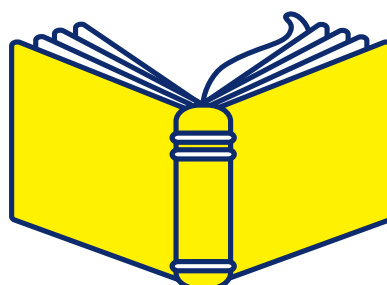
814 clients accessed 21,636 telelink hours

723,957 volunteer hours

2,900 registered volunteers contributed 723,957 hours (equivalent to 90,495 days)



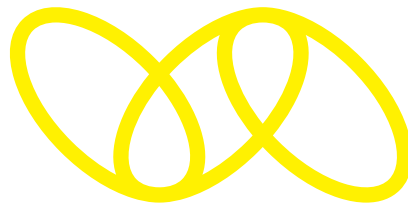
NSW Spectacles Program delivered 56,766 pairs of spectacles to 39,155 people



162,500 print pages converted into:
101,150 braille master pages
38,270 e-text pages
84,660 large print pages
1,390 tactual graphics



Number of home care package clients grew from 97 to 168 this year... a 73% increase



15% of staff at Vision Australia are blind or have low vision



7,181 clients accessed our library services



Vision Australia's impact reaches across the country. Here are some of this year's major achievements showing how we support our clients, link with others, and advocate for change.



Supporting our clients

- Awarded 21 Further Education Bursaries to tertiary students.
- Placed 100 clients into ongoing work through Disability Employment Services.
- Matched 41 Seeing Eye Dogs with clients, including our youngest ever client.
- Received record number of puppy caring applications.
- Recorded all-time high levels of volunteer satisfaction and retention.
- Celebrated 40 years of connecting people through telelink.



Linking with others

- Launched our new Reconciliation Action Plan to strengthen our commitment to reconciliation.
- Bestowed another round of Vision Australia Awards.
- Raised over \$1.3 million from Carols by Candlelight, exceeding all previous years' donations.
- Conducted our second Puppy Games event to celebrate and raise funds for our Seeing Eye Dogs pups-in-training.
- Raised and trained 10 puppies for Canada's CNIB.



Leading the way

- Successfully lobbied local, state and federal governments to influence change.
- Conducted Pups in Parliament event, attracting significant media coverage in national television, press, and online media, with the puppies the clear stars of the show.
- Launched LEGO® Braille Bricks in Australia.
- Consulted with governments and corporations to improve the accessibility of their apps, software and websites.
- Vision Australia Radio was acknowledged in several radio industry awards.

Supporting our clients

A great deal of our critical work is providing services and products that make an immediate and obvious difference across the four areas that our clients identify as important: education, employment, independence and social inclusion.

Here are some of the great things we achieved this year to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose.

Supporting Sam to pursue his radio dreams

Eighteen-year-old Sam has a very clear goal: to have his own radio show where he can advocate for people with disabilities, and educate others about how to support people with disabilities appropriately and respectfully. Currently studying a Diploma of Audio Engineering and Sound Production at Melbourne's JMC Academy, Sam is already well on his way, and being a recipient of a Vision Australia Further Education Bursary has been a great boost, as it provided him with a full suite of audio equipment.

Since its inception in 1996, the bursary program, funded by the generosity of donors, has helped more than 440 clients achieve their dreams of tertiary study.

Supporting our job-seeking clients

This year, 100 clients were placed into ongoing work through our network of employment services, a 26% increase on last year. Clients found work in a diverse range of sectors, including engineering, education, hospitality, security, retail, and law.



Above: Totally blind after having had both eyes removed in childhood due to bilateral retinoblastoma, Sam is a recipient of a 2021 Vision Australia Further Education Bursary. "I want to help spread awareness, and the media is a great way of doing that," he said.

We also accepted six tertiary graduates into our Career Start program, making it our largest cohort ever, and bringing our total number of participants to 26. Employed by Vision Australia for nine months then by an external organisation for three months, graduates acquire specific skills as well as a solid work history they can present to potential employers.

Supporting social connections

In November 2020, telelink celebrated its 40th birthday. This is a wonderful testimony to the work of our volunteers who facilitate this important program to connect like-minded people across Australia by phone or video conferencing. This year, our 60 volunteers facilitated more than 21,000 hours of telelink to 814 clients.

Supporting clients with Seeing Eye Dogs

Despite the various and unpredictable travel restrictions in place during this year, Seeing Eye Dogs instructors managed to match and train 41 Seeing Eye Dogs with their handlers.

One of those 41 was 14-year-old Ollie from Queensland who, after he was matched with Sadie, became our youngest ever handler. As soon as Ollie met Sadie, he knew that his years of waiting and preparation were worth it, and that Sadie was going to dramatically improve his mobility and quality of life.

An upgrade of our Mobility Training Centre in Kensington has made it ideal for fundraising events and Seeing Eye Dogs graduations. Now equipped with seating for 80 people, it also has a meeting room with video-conferencing capabilities, a mounted screen, and air-conditioning throughout, making life much more comfortable for puppies and their trainers during Melbourne's hot summers.



Above: 14-year-old Ollie has always wanted a Seeing Eye Dog, and this year he became our youngest ever handler. Ollie and Sadie have not only forged a strong bond, they've also paved the way for other young people to achieve greater independence by being matched with a Seeing Eye Dog.

Helping seniors get online

Partnering with the Good Things Foundation, we delivered a highly successful Be Connected program to 100 senior clients, helping them use technology safely and confidently to connect with friends and family, pay bills, and even order in dinner.



Above: Nam and one of our access technology specialists worked together to build Nam's confidence and competence in using online technology.

Supporting the education of children and young people

Vision Australia delivers a range of services to improve the educational outcomes and employment prospects of children and young people.

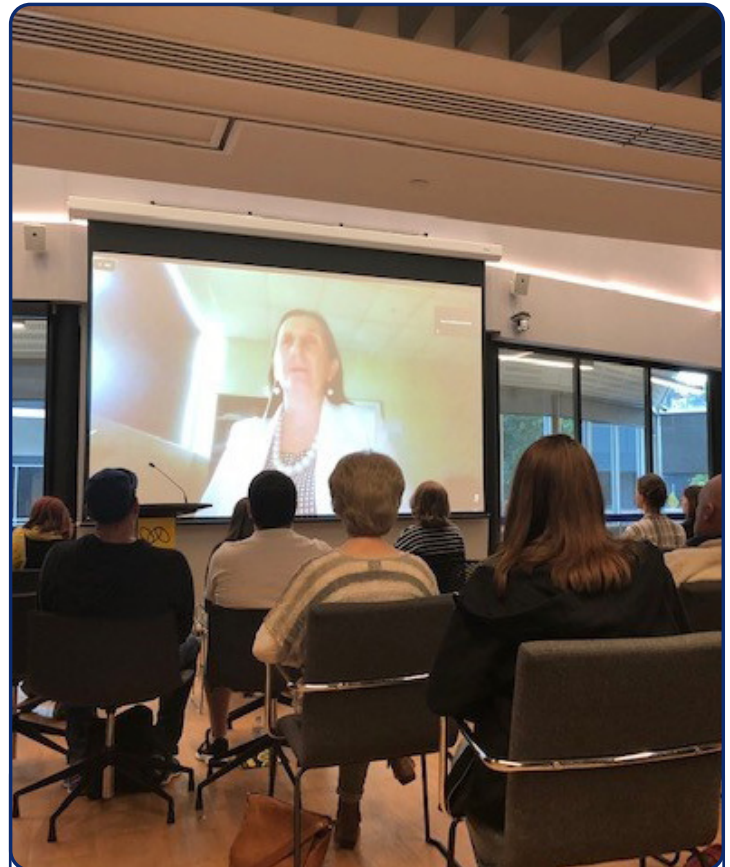
Project EmployAbility

Project EmployAbility this year established two paediatric hubs managed by a centralised paediatric team, thereby building our capability to contribute to our young clients' lifelong independence and social inclusion.

We also introduced an innovative new project called LEAP Up, which is a five-week program that helps students prepare for tertiary education. Nine young people aged 14 to 18 participated in a simulated university experience to acquire the skills and study habits needed for successful tertiary study. Following the pilot's success, we will be offering LEAP Up to more young clients who are thinking about going on to tertiary education.

As in the past, this year's Careers Sampler event featured mentors with blindness or low vision. Delivering inspiring talks, they interacted with children and young people with blindness or low vision, as well as their families and vision support teachers, to talk about career possibilities. We had 47 participants attending our offices in person, and at least another 45 participants logging in from home.

The multi-year Project EmployAbility has been made possible thanks to the generous and significant support of a private foundation.



Above: Attendees at our Careers Sampler event in Melbourne enjoyed listening to keynote speaker, our Volunteer Partnerships Director and former academic, Dr Theresa Ruig. Theresa spoke about her successful and varied career and how young clients can gain workplace skills.

Access to a full education experience

Many students who are blind or have low vision encounter a range of difficulties at school, which Vision Australia is tackling head on, and in a variety of ways.

With the aim of presenting an informed response to the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards in Education, we surveyed 87 parents and students about their primary and secondary school experiences. Their responses indicated a range of issues that need to be addressed urgently, including that many schools fail to make even simple changes to the built environment (such as installing contrasting colours on stairs), and that many students do not have access to a full curriculum or complete range of learning experiences.

In addition, nearly half of the students had experienced discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation at school.

Education assessments

One way Vision Australia is addressing these issues is by conducting assessments of schools' technology and physical environments. Assessments consider everything from playgrounds and stairways to the lighting, layout, and seating arrangements in classrooms, and how teachers present information.

Schools receive a detailed report with general recommendations, as well as specific recommendations to improve the experiences of their current students who are blind or have low vision, and individual teachers learn how to better address the needs of their students.

For example, this year, we've worked with several Catholic schools in the Parramatta Diocese and completed environment and technology assessments at 15 of their schools.



Above: Ten-year-old Haya uses a handheld electronic magnifier that enables her to read a wide array of books and other printed material.

Supporting access to information

Vision Australia's audio services

In another busy year, 410 volunteers at Vision Australia Radio produced 5,820 hours of local content that reached more than 700,000 listeners per month.

We also enhanced our listeners' experiences by investing in new software and hardware for 11 broadcast services and sites as well as a new streaming platform for eight services, resulting in improvements to broadcast quality, connectivity, and accessibility.

In addition, we launched a fully revised on-air program guide to both manage the impact of COVID-19 and increase local content for our listeners. This included three new national programs that use online news sources, so that listeners receive more up-to-date news that is more environmentally friendly as well as being cheaper to produce.

We also produced a new ten-part podcast series called *Nothing's Off Limits*, which discusses important and sometimes personal issues that are often ignored in the context of people who are blind and have low vision (e.g. menstruation management, mental health, and sexuality).

Vision Australia Radio also provides audio transcription for documents such as forms, bank statements, sheet music and instruction manuals, particularly where there are diagrams or other visual elements. This year, the team produced audio versions of 360 such documents for our clients.



Above: Many listeners tune in to Vision Australia Radio to hear the daily newspapers, made possible thanks to volunteers like Marilyn, seen here recording a carefully read transcription of a newspaper. Clients can listen to these readings on a variety of devices and platforms.

Audio description

As more organisations recognise people's need to access video content, Vision Australia is providing audio descriptions for an increasing number of events, exhibits, productions, and videos. In addition to providing audio description for 22 Vision Australia videos, our work this year also included audio description for 88 video-based media for external clients, including corporate training modules, university videos, and a full feature film entitled *Thomas Banks*, available on Stan. In a highly successful collaboration with the ABC and SBS, we also developed a system that clients can use to access television guides that we have compiled that list audio-described programs.

Despite restrictions impacting dates and theatre capacity, we also provided audio description for 30 live theatre events, including opera, ballet, musicals and drama. With Melbourne Theatre Company this year releasing their first digital season, we were thrilled to provide audio description for *Berlin*, creating history with Australia's first ever audio description of a streamed theatre performance.

Vision Australia library

Since adopting Bookshare in 2020, our library has focused on providing a more enjoyable audio experience and engaging and growing our membership. For example, we reinstated our quarterly library newsletter, and ran a series of in-person and online author talks that were extremely popular.

We also added 75 magazines to our wide range of general interest and popular titles, and expanded into different types of content, such as podcasts and television guides.

Responding to client feedback, we updated our VA Connect app with features that clients asked for, provided faster service and easier signups for Envoy Connect, and updated Kiosk software so that clients can download titles at home. In addition, we became an approved service centre for Orbit braille displays, which means devices no longer have to be sent overseas for repairs so clients can enjoy faster repair times.

With lockdowns threatening to stall our book recordings, we developed production systems for volunteers to record books at home so that production continued smoothly and successfully.



Above: Envoy Connect devices are now faster and easier to use, thanks to the changes we made this year to our processes and support services.



Above: Like many other children who are blind or have low vision, Charlotte loves our Felix Library that packages children's books with a braille overlay and a range of multi-sensory objects that enhance the reading experience.

Volunteer engagement

Our 2,900 registered volunteers, many of whom are blind or have low vision, this year contributed nearly 724,000 hours of their time, which is a staggering 90,495 working days, or more than 145 years of work! From helping our library members transition to the Bookshare platform, to transcribing music, to managing our Facebook group for volunteer puppy carers, our volunteers work in 100 different roles, and always display an extraordinary level of dedication.

It's particularly pleasing that this year's volunteer survey indicated volunteer engagement and retention is at an all-time high.

Linking with others

Each year, Vision Australia initiates and conducts a diverse range of campaigns and events designed to help us achieve our mission. They range from fundraising, to increasing awareness of the community's needs, to improving how we work. Here are some of the highlights from this year.

Strengthening our commitment to reconciliation

Vision Australia provides services to more than 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in metropolitan and regional centres. Although we are thrilled to be able to help every single one of these people, we know that we need to do more. At this stage, our primary focus is to build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities while piloting service delivery options in remote areas, like Alice Springs, in order to address the challenges of reach and sustainability.

This year, we updated our Reconciliation Action Plan – Reflect, which has been endorsed by Reconciliation Australia, and was launched during NAIDOC Week. During its development, we commissioned a piece of artwork

from Holly McLennan-Brown, a proud Yorta Yorta woman. Designed to represent our commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to address inequality, *Working together* is displayed in all of our offices, on lapel pins for staff, and on the front cover of our RAP.

As in past years, Vision Australia held a series of events for Reconciliation Week, including a traditional smoking ceremony where David Tournier, a Boonwurrung senior cultural officer, conducted the Welcome to Country, and Kiernan Ironfield, of the Dharug people, played the yidaki.

This year, we acknowledged NAIDOC Week by focusing on our delivery of eye health services to Indigenous Australians, and ensuring that all our staff understand the significance of NAIDOC Week. Throughout the week, staff attended presentations that were led by proud Bundjalung man and CEO of Corporate Culcha, Paul Dodd. The presentations focused on this year's NAIDOC Week's message of 'Heal Country, heal our nation'.

Right: Created by Holly McLennan-Brown, a proud Yorta Yorta woman, this stunning artwork adorns the cover of our RAP. The circles in the centre represent the Vision Australia community and the U shapes represent clients and others coming together with Vision Australia. Emerging from the centre of the artwork are white lines representing the various pathways and services Vision Australia offers, while the paw prints represent our Seeing Eye Dogs.





Above: Australia's first blind fashion designer and a recipient of a 2020 Vision Australia Award, Nikki Hind (right) is congratulated by Vision Australia CEO Ron Hooton (left).

Vision Australia Awards

The Vision Australia Awards were first handed out in 2006 to recognise and celebrate individuals and organisations who contribute their time and resources to support the blind and low vision community and the work of Vision Australia. Individual recipients this year were Jane Britt, board members Sara Watts and Heith Mackay-Cruise, well-known entertainer David Campbell, and Australia's first blind fashion designer Nikki Hind.

Carols by Candlelight

This year's Carols by Candlelight was like no other: for the first time in the event's 83-year history, it was conducted without a live audience at Melbourne's iconic Sidney Myer Music Bowl. Beamed across the country on Christmas Eve by our broadcast partner, the Nine Network, it remained a firm ratings favourite watched by millions of people across Australia. The event was declared a wonderful success, raising an impressive \$1.3 million in public donations, surpassing previous years' fundraising results.

Heartfelt thanks go to our event partners, the Nine Network, Arts Centre Melbourne, our sponsors, and of course, the many artists who generously gave their time and shared their marvellous talents so that the show could go on.

As in past years, we provided audio description of every minute of the show, made possible thanks to our partnership with Belong. Not only did this enhance the enjoyment of members of our community, it also generated \$15,000 in revenue for our audio services.



Above: (From left to right) Silvie Paladino, David Hobson and Marina Prior bring to life the wonder and magic of Carols by Candlelight as they perform *Song of Joy*, accompanied by the Carols by Candlelight Orchestra and the Melbourne Youth Orchestra string section.



Left: This year's Carols by Candlelight choir members might have had to sing their hearts out from their homes, but their enthusiasm and talent was delivered to the stage (and our hearts) via the big screen.

Seeing Eye Dogs Puppy Games

It seems that the public just can't get enough of puppies, so we were thrilled when we were able to hold our second Puppy Games in conjunction with the annual Petbarn Foundation's Seeing Eye Dogs Appeal. Held in July 2021, this event helped to raise an impressive \$851,153 (easily exceeding the appeal's target of \$750k), all of which has gone directly to helping our breeding and training programs.



Above: Aiming for the hotly contested gold medals at this year's Puppy Games were Seeing Eye Dogs pups-in-training (from left to right) Isobel, Frieda, Chessy and Ivory, with their puppy development trainers (from left to right) Lissette, Paige, Jack and Abi.

Canadian partnership

Seeing Eye Dogs and Canada's CNIB have a long-standing association, and this year, Vision Australia raised and trained pups who will go on to partner with our colleagues' clients in Canada. We also enjoyed the company and experience of CNIB staff member Kezia, who came here on secondment and received training from Seeing Eye Dogs.

Relationships with international bodies such as CNIB help to ensure that we are leading the way when it comes to developing and implementing standards and best practice in the field of assistive animals.



Above: Four of our wonderful volunteer puppy carers (from left to right) Michaela, Judith, Eileen and Jock with CNIB pups-in-training (left to right) Rex, Harley, Bridget and Oscar showing off their finely honed skills in our Mobility Training Centre at Kensington.

Leading the way

Vision Australia leads the way by listening to our clients. Staying informed of their experiences, needs and preferences through surveys, conversations and other feedback, helps us to improve our services. It also strengthens our advocacy work, so that we can have a genuine impact on legislation, accessibility and funding.

This work involves making submissions to enquiries and Royal Commissions, lobbying governments, businesses, and employers for change, and promoting social change in other settings, such as during fundraising events and media appearances.

This year, we:

- provided 13 formal submissions to Royal Commissions, agencies and government enquiries
- appeared or presented at six committee hearings
- participated in four surveys to provide input into government and social decisions.

Lobbying for change

Despite the ongoing impact of COVID-19, we were able to increase our research activities this year, and therefore build on our evidence base that informs our policy submissions.

Our Government Relations and Advocacy team represented Vision Australia at numerous state government advisory committees addressing issues that included employment, transport, health, elections, and provision of government services. Our participation in these committees keeps governments informed of the needs and preferences of people who are blind or have low vision.

The team was also active with many other organisations across the disability and aging sectors.

Collaborating with these organisations helps us identify and set priorities, and strengthens our work in lobbying for change.

Pups in Parliament

While presenting facts and figures to government representatives can be very persuasive, there's nothing like a puppy to move people to take action... which is why we held a Seeing Eye Dogs graduation ceremony at the Parliament of New South Wales. The event was a chance not only to congratulate our Sydney-based clients and their new dog guides, but also to highlight the important work of Seeing Eye Dogs and the difference they make in our clients' lives.

Following the success of our previous Pups in Parliament, we held another one in May this year. Held at Australian Parliament House, the event attracted over 150 members of parliament and advisors, all keen to spend time with the three puppies in training - Olga, Bingo and Dory - who were the stars of the show. Our delegates met with politicians to discuss potential changes to the NDIS, access rights for assistance animals, and Disability Employment Services.



Above: Federal Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston (right) invited Chris Edwards (left) and his Seeing Eye Dog Odie into the Senate chamber, when Odie became the first ever assistance animal to enter the chamber.

Some of our successes

While significant social and legislative changes often require years of consistent and focused advocacy, we're pleased to report that this year we've seen the results of several of our campaigns, including those listed below.

- A change in government policy has made it easier for people who are blind or have low vision to join Western Australia's disability parking program.
- The Queensland Government contributed funds to our 2021-22 library services.
- Rideshare company Uber updated their app so that participants of Victoria's Multi-Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) can now receive half-price Uber rides up to the value of \$60.
- Staff in public hospitals in New South Wales now have appropriate information and training resources related to the care of patients who are blind or have low vision.
- The Australian Banking Association adopted a set of guidelines we developed that specify how banks can best provide assistance during the pandemic to their customers who are blind or have low vision.

Governor-General creates history

Members of our Seeing Eye Dog team joined Australia's Governor-General, His Excellency, General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) at Government House in May to discuss the importance of our work and the impact a Seeing Eye Dog can have on a client's independence. In addition to appreciating the opportunity to discuss these issues, we were delighted when the talented Her Excellency Mrs Linda Hurley performed a song she had written that celebrates Vision Australia.



Above: Seeing Eye Dog pup-in-training Dory captured the attention of the media along with (centre) Federal Minister for Health the Hon. Greg Hunt, MP and (right) Member for Higgins Dr Katie Allen, MP at this year's Pups in Parliament.



Above: The Governor-General creates history by taking a blindfold walk in the grounds of Government House with Seeing Eye Dog Olga and instructor Brooke. His Excellency is the only Governor-General to experience first-hand the difference a Seeing Eye Dog can make.

LEGO® Braille Bricks

In February 2021, Vision Australia joined forces with the LEGO® Foundation to introduce LEGO® Braille Bricks to Australia. With raised bumps that are arranged to correspond to numbers and letters in the braille alphabet, these specially designed bricks are an innovative and fun way for children who are blind or have low vision to learn braille.

To celebrate the Australian launch, we welcomed 20 families to a special event at Melbourne's LEGOLAND® Discovery Centre where they enjoyed some hands-on fun with the Braille Bricks, explored the entire centre, and experienced the 4D cinema. We've since dispatched 381 kits to public schools in all states and territories, as well as to several Catholic schools, independent schools and other organisations. We also developed a tailored one-hour webinar for educators about how to use the kits with their students. We're delighted that students now have a fun way of improving their braille literacy.



Digital Access work

This year's expansion of our Digital Access team helped us grow the design, consulting and training sides of the business and achieve a number of significant outcomes. Highlights of the year included:

- consulting on the accessibility of 142 external web and app projects
- running 15 in-house training courses for external organisations on topics that included accessible communications and marketing, making documents accessible, and inclusive design
- facilitating 54 public training courses on accessibility
- conducting 9 free lunchtime webinars for the public on topics that included inclusive design and web accessibility testing tools.

We also conducted a rigorous review of the federal government's online COVID-19 vaccine eligibility checker, revealing that the platform failed to meet several of the government's own accessibility requirements as set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

Of particular concern was that the platform had poor colour contrasts, excessive alternative text and large sections that were incompatible with screen-reading software. These all made it harder for people who are blind or have low vision to access information on the platform, determine their eligibility for a COVID-19 vaccination, or find out where they can receive a vaccine. In response to the review, the government indicated their commitment to address these accessibility issues.

Top left: Senior practitioner Trish introduces six-year-old Harlen to LEGO® Braille Bricks.

Bottom left: Harlen quickly became an expert at using the new LEGO® Braille Bricks that helped him improve his braille literacy.

Seeing Eye Dogs produces the next generation of dog guide instructors

The ranks of one of Australia's rarest occupations swelled this year, when three dog guide instructors graduated from our first ever Seeing Eye Dogs instructor traineeship. Our three graduates—Carly, Emma, and Jenny—are now part of a profession that numbers only about 60 people across Australia. All three of them share a passion for working with animals and a strong desire to help others, and were also volunteers with Seeing Eye Dogs before moving into their three-year traineeship.

Having now graduated, they will fill their days by training clients and their newly matched Seeing Eye Dogs. "Being able to provide a client with their mobility aid and seeing the difference it makes to their life and independence is truly an indescribable feeling," Jenny said.



Above: After three years of hard work, the first cohort of our Seeing Eye Dogs traineeship celebrated their graduation in July. Seen here proudly showing off their graduation certificates are, from left to right, Jenny, Caitlin (one of our senior instructors), Emma, and Carly.

Right: *Talking Tech* co-host Stephen Jolley, who is a whizz behind the microphone, enjoys conversing with his many listeners.



Above: Award-winning producer and presenter of *Studio 1*, Matthew Layton, about to begin another of his popular broadcasts.

Awards

We were absolutely thrilled when *Studio 1*, a news and current affairs program on Vision Australia Radio, won the award for Excellence in News and Current Affairs Programming at the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia's (CBA) 2020 Community Radio Awards. Produced and presented by Matthew Layton, *Studio 1* was also awarded a silver medal in the Best Radio Podcast category at the 2020 Australian Podcast Awards, making it one of the most highly awarded shows that Vision Australia Radio has ever produced.

Two other Vision Australia Radio programs were finalists in the CBA awards: *Talking Tech* in the category Best Radio Program - Talks; and *The 2019 Victorian Disability Sport and Recreation Festival* in the category Best Special Event Broadcast. In addition, volunteer Peter Greco was a finalist in the category Outstanding Volunteer Contribution.



We couldn't do it without you

Vision Australia was grateful to receive approximately \$37.8 million in public charitable support this year from a variety of sources and supporters. No matter how small or large, your donation goes a long way to supporting people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose. Fundraising provides Vision Australia with a significant proportion of our annual operating turnover, so we couldn't support as many people as we do without your most generous contributions. Every one of us at Vision Australia greatly appreciates your contribution.

While our total was slightly down on previous years, no doubt due to the impact of COVID-19, we are deeply appreciative of our many donors' collective support to our appeals, lotteries and regular-giving pledge programs, and of our major donors and philanthropic grant program that helped sustain the services we provide.

Together donating \$10.2 million, 38,954 generous people supported Vision Australia and Seeing Eye Dogs with their regular giving. This is the highest amount received in the past five years.

For some of our donors, leaving a gift to Vision Australia in their wills is a very special way to continue the support and care for people into the future. In 2020-21, we received \$13.04 million in generous donations through bequests. Gifts left in wills are a significant portion of Vision Australia's fundraising income, making up 34% of funds raised this financial year. Thank you to everyone who has made a positive difference to our organisation's mission by leaving a gift to Vision Australia in their will.

Right: Vision Australia's gifts in wills manager Nigel (left) warmly thanks Raymond (right) for his generosity in including Vision Australia in his will.

Engaging with donors

We were delighted to relaunch our Iris Circle Bequest Society and host several events for our loyal and long-standing supporters in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. These events gave us an opportunity to re-engage with people who have generously included a gift to Vision Australia or Seeing Eye Dogs in their will. Each guest was presented with a certificate of appreciation and a commemorative key ring, and was able to hear more about the services we provide as well as stories from our clients that highlight how bequests have improved their lives.



Above: Vision Australia's chief financial officer Justine (right) with Susie (left), who is holding her certificate expressing our appreciation of her generous bequest.





Above: From left to right, Danni, Tina and Colleen enjoyed meeting Seeing Eye Dog Mojo at this year's Iris Circle Bequest Society function in Brisbane.

enjoyed a performance by singer-songwriter and Vision Australia client Jade Sullivan, along with talks from four of Australia's most inspirational speakers: Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC; investigative journalist and Walkley Award-winner Kate McClymont AM; Australia's first female commercial airline pilot Deborah Lawrie AM; and surfing champion Layne Beachley AO.

Both the committee and Vision Australia are extremely grateful for the generosity and support shown by so many people in a particularly challenging year, and we thank the committee for their \$100,000 donation.

The J.O. & J.R. Wicking Trust

The J.O. & J.R. Wicking Trust and Vision Australia have had a long and successful partnership since 2003 and, having contributed \$16.98 million over the intervening years, the Trust is our most significant philanthropist. Most recently, and over the past four years, the Trust's contribution to our Digital Transformation Program has been instrumental in enabling us to deliver important services in an ever-changing digital world.

Thanks to the Trust's ongoing support, we've personalised a number of services for our clients, developed engaging digital experiences and fundraising platforms, and empowered our staff with improved technology to continue their great work.

Black and White Committees

The Black and White Committee of Vision Australia (Double Bay) were delighted to host their 35th annual Women of Achievement Lunch in June, proudly sponsored by the Susan and Isaac Wakil Foundation. The 320 guests

The Maitland Black and White Committee and Mudgee Black and White Committee, although unable to host events this year, have remained active and are ready to resume activities to support Vision Australia as soon as they can. Despite not being able to host any events, the Mudgee Committee were able to raise funds and subsequently made a generous donation.



Above: Members and guests of the Black and White Committee of Vision Australia (Double Bay) at their annual Women of Achievement Lunch.

Thank you

Meet our corporate partners, and fundraising committees, as well as the many wonderful individuals, businesses and organisations who have each supported us by donating more than \$10,000 this year. We also thank all the wonderful supporters who chose to remain anonymous.

Gifts in wills/bequests

Margaret Abercrombie
Nessie Appleby
Shirley Arthur
Shirley Bailey
Emma Baybara
Edith Bertaux
Shirley Beutel
Ernest Blake
Frank Boreham
Ann Rachel Bury
William Bussman
Heather Cadau
Glenis Carter
Madge Chisnall
Leslie Counsell
Doreen Crawley
Dulcie Elaine Curtis
Barbara Anne Dowling
Roma Ethel Duffell
Charles Mortimer Eastley
Neville Leonard Ellis
Dr Brian Roger Entwisle
Joanne Elizabeth Erwin
Lesley Farrant
Elaine Frost
Michael Galea
Micheil Bruce Gibb
Rodney Glendenning
Robert Green
Robert Hamilton
Joyce Hamilton-Smith
Maurice Harding
Tjityske Harvey
Raymond Haswell
Robert Hayes
Geraldine Hill
Marion Isabel Jennings
Stanley Johanson
Ian Johns
Walter Kovalski

Chin Teong Lee
Raymond Maher
Alan John Matheson
Kathleen McAuliffe
Ian McLean
Norma McLeish
Ralf Moller
Morna Mulvogue
Margaret O'Dwyer
Frances Parkinson
Robert Rabone
John Redapple
Rita Riccio
Sheila Rooke
Pamela Rowland
Allan Rowling
Hendrik Runeman
Ronda Sanders
William Schuberg
Michan Serrafian
Kenneth Smith
Vincent Thomas Smith
James Henry Stewart
Anne Thorburn
Hannelore Tittman
Neil Milton Toovey
Vivian Treloar
Terrence Tully
Joyce Tyrer
Graeme William Vines
Marcel Visseren
Lorna June Walker
Suzette Walker
Kevin William Wall
Constance Watson
Margaret Watts
Raymond Thomas Watts
Kathleen Weinberg
Brenda White
Sheila W Woodcock

Trusts and foundations

Allen and Cecilia Tye Fund
Allport Bequest
Amy Irene Christina Ostberg Estate
Arthur Leonard Raper Charitable Trust
Bill and Jean Henson Charitable Trust
Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation
Centenary Foundation - Scott Family Bequest
Collier Charitable Fund
David Allen Trust
Dick and Pip Smith Foundation
Eleanor Weir Vicars-Foote Estate
Eric Crawford Memorial Fund
Estate of Lewis J Wilson
Estate of the Late Georgena Elizabeth Bradshaw
Estate of the Late John Frederick Wright
Family Frank Foundation
Flannery Foundation
Flora and Frank Leith Charitable Trust
Florance Hattersley Trust
Gregory Patrick and Marie Dolores Farrell Foundation
Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
Henry James Francis Estate
IMB Bank Community Foundation
James N. Kirby Foundation
Jane Williamson Charitable Trust
Kenneth Martin Estate
Leslie Francis Gill Trust
Lily Maude Payne Charitable Trust
Lionel R V Spencer Trust
Olive Woods Trust
Oscar William Eschenhagen Edwards Trust
Percy Baxter Charitable Trust
Perpetual Foundation - Sibley Endowment
Philandron Foundation
PW Foundation
Russell Vontom Charitable Trust
S.T.A.F. - Lockwood Murray Hogben Bequest

S.T.A.F. - Frederick John Banbury
S.T.A.F. - John and Sylvia Lindsay Donation
S.T.A.F. - Judith De Garrood Donation
S.T.A.F. - Thomas James Malcolmson Skipper-Jacobs Charitable Trust
Sparrow Foundation
The Andrew and Geraldine Buxton Foundation
The Donald Fraser Family Fund
The Edith Kemp Memorial Trust Fund
The Elliott Family Trust
The Estate of the Late William H Fernie
The Hardie Family Bequest
The Hargrove Foundation
The Honda Foundation
The Howard Glover Perpetual Charitable Trust
The J.O. & J.R. Wicking Trust
The Kemvan Trust
The Lin Huddleston Charitable Foundation
The Mudford Fund for Young People
The Muffin Foundation
The Orloff Family Charitable Trust
The Profield Foundation
The Sally Sinisoff Trust Fund
The Vernon Sinclair Fund
The William Mansel Higgins and Dorothy Higgins Charitable Trust
Urquhart Charitable Fund
William Andrew Bon Charitable Trust

Individuals

Mr R and Mrs E Albert
Mrs R Andre
Mr L and Mrs A Browne
Ms J Cain
Mr B and Mrs N Callaghan
In memory of Colin Colgan
Mr D and Mrs A Craig
Mrs Monica Craig
Mr D Davis
Mr R Edwards
Michael Fung and Anne-Marie Tosolini

Mr A Gusbeth
Mr R Kaiser
Cathy and James King
Mr C Lin
Mrs E Lustig
Mrs R McKeown
Mrs W McPherson
Dr B McSherry
Miss A Miller
Jeanette and David Milston
Mr P Newell
Mr P Okkerse
Mr G Painton
Marc Quinlivan OAM
In memory of Ron Rauert
Mr B and Mrs J Royle
Mrs S Sawyer
Mr M Schroder
Miss J Sheridan
Mrs J Smith
Mr D and Mrs J Wong

Organisations

Archibald's Leak Detection Services Pty Ltd
Focus Eyecare Studio
Lotterywest
Reserve Bank of Australia
Security Portman Pty Ltd
VivCourt

Registered clubs

DOOLEYS Lidcombe Catholic Club
Wenty Leagues

Committees and auxiliaries

Black and White Committee of Vision Australia
Cohuna Friends of Vision Australia Committee
Cressy Friends of Vision Australia Committee
Friends of Vision Australia Coorparoo
Gisborne Friends of Vision Australia Committee
International Committee

Kyneton Friends of Vision Australia Committee
Lions Club of Bombala
Lions Club of Figtree
Lions Club of Leeuwin
Lions Club of Margaret River
Maitland Black and White Committee
Mudgee Black and White Committee
Skipton Friends of Vision Australia
Wangaratta Friends of Vision Australia Committee
Whitsunday Lions Club
Yass Friends of Vision Australia

Seeing Eye Dogs Corporate Partners

Petbarn
Petbarn Foundation
Royal Canin

Carols by Candlelight partners

Major partners

Arts Centre Melbourne
Marriott International Group

Media partners

Channel 9
News Corp Ltd
3AW
Smooth FM
JC Decaux
Vision Australia Radio

Supporting partners

Villa Maria
TEG Entertainment Store
NAB
Evan Evans
Crown Coaches
St Johns
Hamper World
Crosscom



..... Above: Volunteer puppy carers, like Eileen shown here with Canada's CNIB puppy-in-training Bridget, work with passion and diligence to ensure a continued supply of dog guides.

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- Enter into a corporate partnership
- Volunteer with us
- Leave a bequest
- Donate now

Vision Australia

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@visionaustralia



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visionaustralia

Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs

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seeingeyedogs



seeingeyedogsaustralia

Vision Australia Radio

Tune into our radio stations on the frequencies listed below. Vision Australia Radio is also broadcast over digital stations in Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide.

New South Wales

Albury/Wodonga 101.7 FM

Victoria

Bendigo 88.7 FM

Geelong 99.5 FM

Melbourne 1179 AM /VA Radio DAB+

Mildura 107.5 FM

Shepparton 100.1 FM

Warragul 93.5 FM

Warrnambool 882 AM

South Australia

Adelaide 1197 AM /VA Radio DAB+

Western Australia

Perth 990 AM /VA Radio DAB+

Northern Territory

Darwin VA Radio DAB+



Community Broadcasting Foundation Ltd

Left: Logo of Community Broadcasting Foundation Limited

The Vision Australia Radio Network acknowledges the advocacy and support of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, the ongoing collaborative partnership with RPH Australia, and the Australian Government's financial support for this vital service via the Community Broadcasting Foundation.